

Statement on the United Kingdom and the European Common Market (October 1956)

Caption: In October 1956, more than 50 eminent public figures from the United Kingdom publish a statement in which they advocate the United Kingdom's participation in the negotiations on the European Common Market.

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Statement on a European Common Market (October 1956)

Six nations are drafting a Treaty to form a common market. Britain is not among them, and we have a choice to make. We may join in the negotiations now, make our voice heard and work for a treaty which will bring greater prosperity to ourselves and our friends on the continent, without prejudicing our Commonwealth interests. The other road is to stand aloof and later have to negotiate with the countries of the Common market from the outside on a treaty which we had no part in drafting. The undersigned believe that the most intelligent course is that of direct co-operation and participation. In the House of Commons two mentions have already been tabled calling on the Government to join in the present talks.

The proposal for the Common European Market was put to the Foreign Ministers of the six countries of the European Coal and Steel Community at their meeting at Messina a year ago. It is an attempt to create a prosperous and stable Europe able to reap the benefits of automation and the atom. It is considered that the current economic crises of Western Europe are due to the lack of balance between the great common market of the United States and the divided economies of Europe. The Communist bloc also is moving towards even greater economic unity and now presents a challenge in Africa and Asia which Europe must fit itself to meet.

The European Coal and Steel Community, which Britain refused to join, has demonstrated the advantages of a European solution. By entering into negotiations now, Britain can make such conditions as may be necessary, particularly in the field of agriculture, to safeguard our special relationship with the Commonwealth. Moreover, the plans call for the common market to come into being gradually over the next fifteen years, so that transitional measures can be taken.

The European Common Market could enable Europe to establish healthy economic relations with the rest of the world. If we neglect to minister to its birth, it may outgrow us and have little need of Britain.

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